

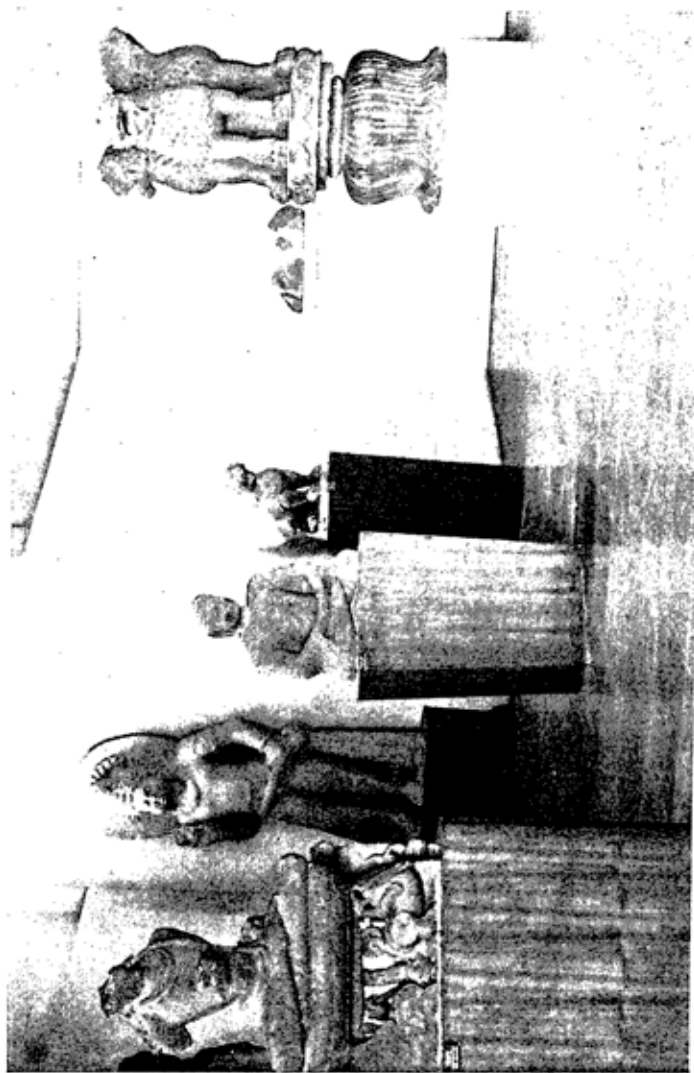
4. THE MUSEUM

A. INTRODUCTION

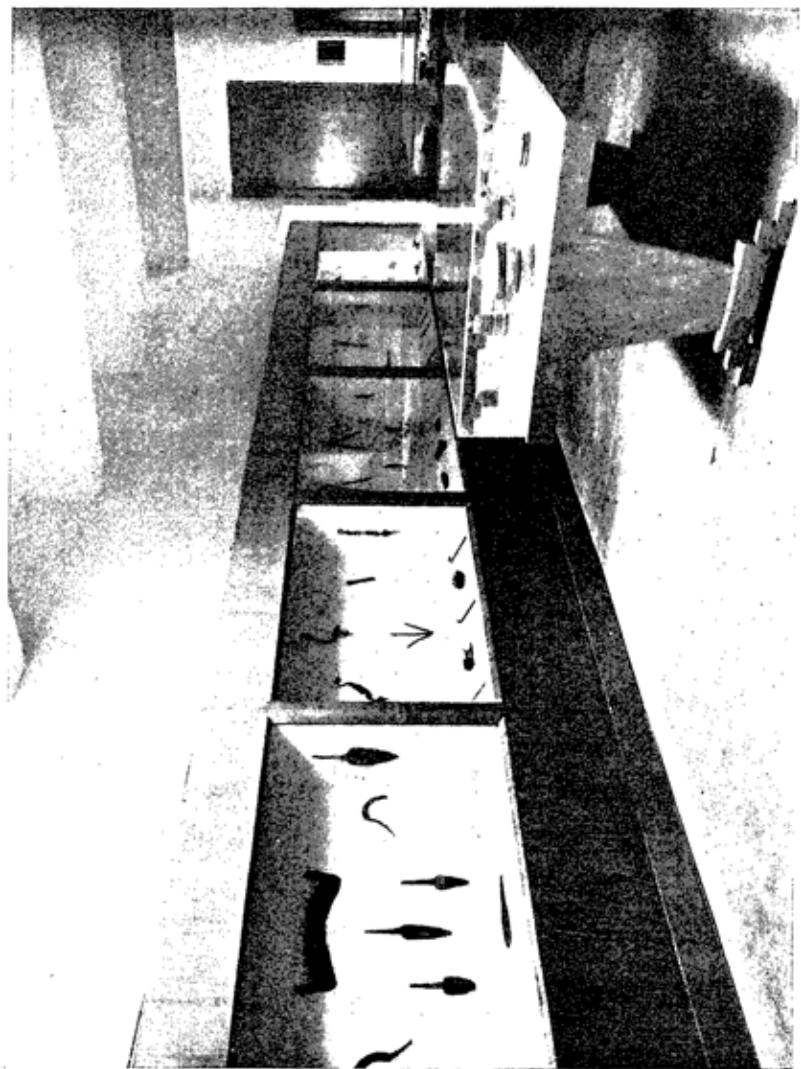
FROM THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY SANCHI REMAINED IN OBLIVION till the year 1818, when it was discovered by General Taylor of the Bengal Cavalry. Thereafter there were many depredations in the name of excavation. Systematic operations to preserve them were undertaken only in 1912 by the Archaeological Survey of India under the direction of Sir John Marshall. In 1919, a small museum was established on the hill-top to protect the numerous movable antiquities found in the operations.

After Independence the museum and monuments, which had hitherto been under the princely State of Bhopal, were transferred to the Archaeological Survey of India. As the museum was utterly unsuitable for the proper housing and exhibition of the valuable antiquities, the Survey purchased a college-building at the foot of the hill and made it fit for a modern museum by making necessary additions and alterations. The new museum, with its vastly-improved display, was formally inaugurated on the 27th March, 1966, by Shri M. C. Chagla, Union Minister for Education.

The museum now consists of a large hall at the northern end of the building and three galleries in a row to its south. Another large hall at the southern

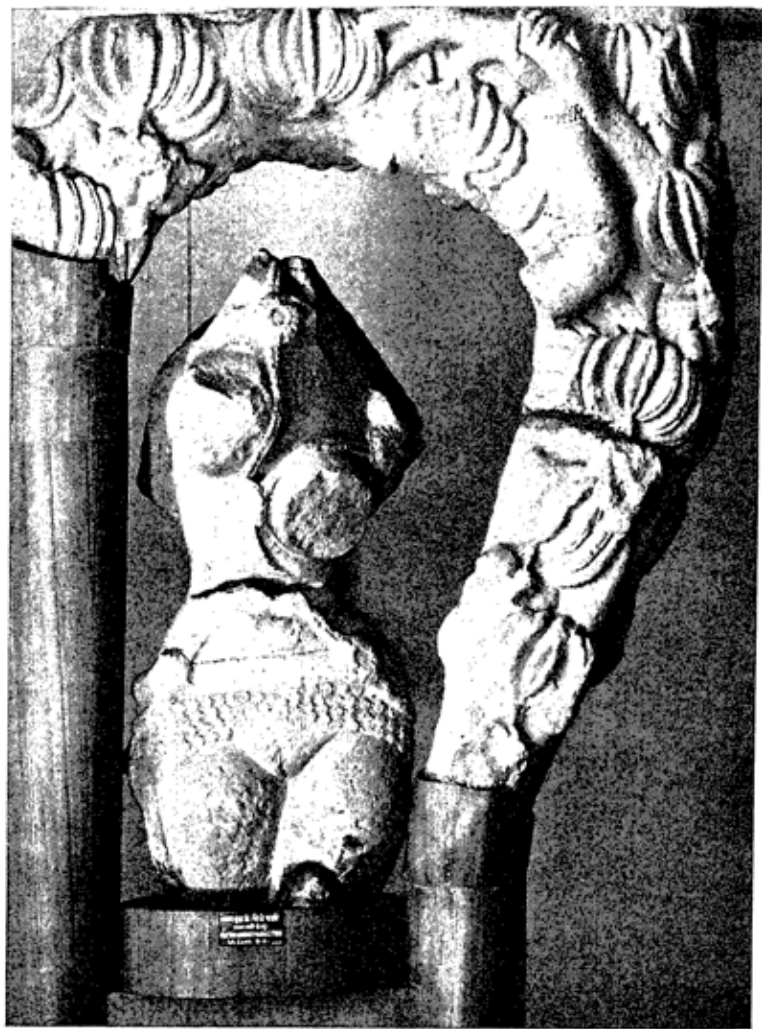


Main hall





Lion-capital of Asoka's pillar

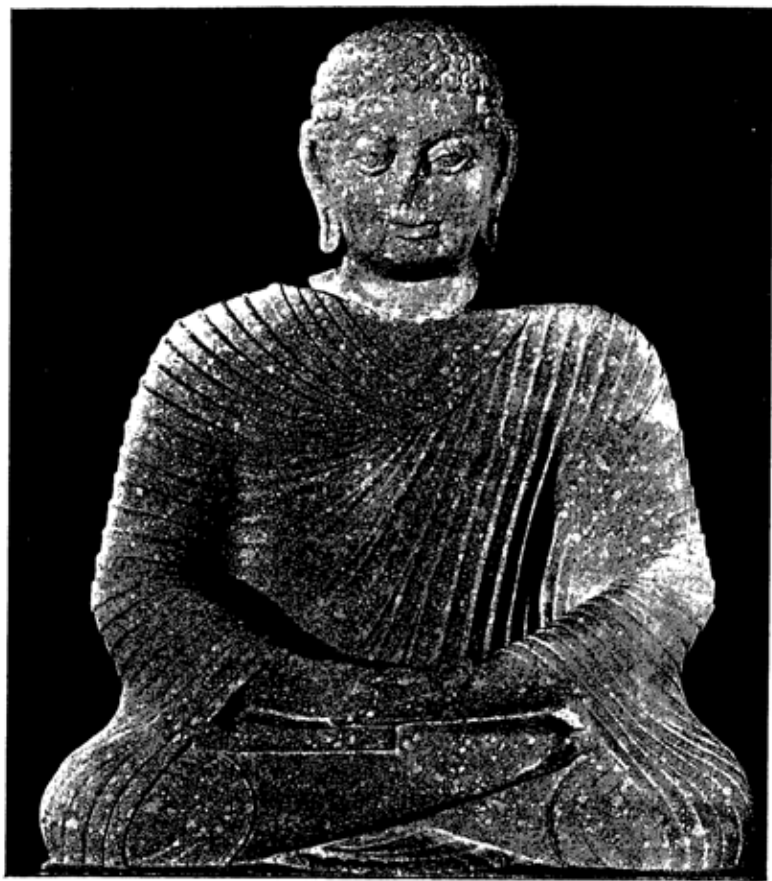


Yakshi



Inscribed pedestal of an image of Buddha

PLATE VI



Buddha



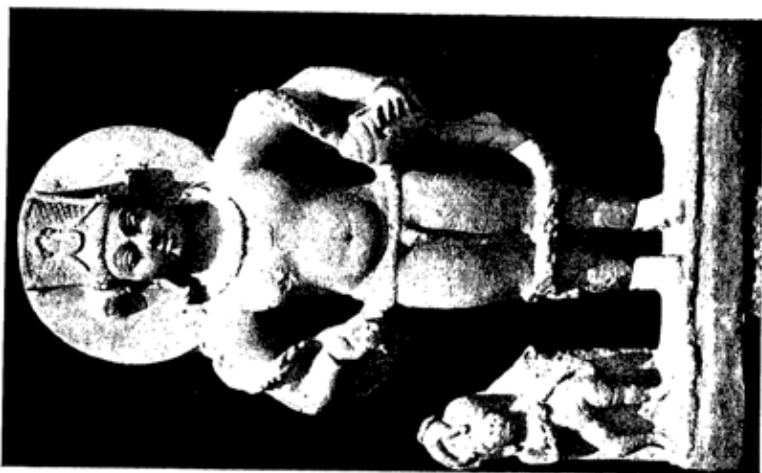
B. *Standing male figure*



A. *Vajrapāṇi*



Mañjuśrī (!)



A. *Vishnu*



B. *Subjugation of Nalagiri*

PLATE X



Lady descending from a couch



Buddha

PLATE XII



Buddha

THE MUSEUM

end has been organized as an 'information hall' for the display of publications, picture-postcards, plaster-casts, etc., which are on sale at the booking-office. A few maps and photographs are also on display to give information about the monuments and the museum.

Entry to the museum is through the northern hall, the main hall, which serves as the key-gallery. Representative examples from different periods are on display here.

The three galleries on the south are numbered as galleries I, 2 and 3, starting from the one nearest the main hall. Generally speaking, large stone sculptures are exhibited in gallery 1; small stone antiquities and miscellaneous objects, in gallery 2; and medium-sized stone sculptures in gallery 3. A few stone sculptures are also displayed in the verandah in front of gallery 2.

A few medieval sculptures from Gyarspur, 45 km. from Sanchi, are also included in the collection.

B. THE MAIN HALL

Stone sculptures and architectural pieces are exhibited in the main hall (pl. 1), the larger ones on free-standing pedestals and others on brackets fixed into the walls. As one enters the hall, one's attention is immediately drawn to the magnificent lion-capital (pl.III) of Aśoka (2868¹), placed at the farther end in an alcove. It consists of a bell-shaped lotus with a cable-

¹ This and the following numerals refer to the accession-numbers of objects and are written in paint on the respective objects.

necking, surmounted by a circular abacus supporting the fore-parts of four lions set back to back, the whole finely finished and polished to a remarkable lustre. It is of buff sandstone of Chunar.

The bell has been pieced together out of a number of fragments and partially restored. It is decorated with sixteen conventional petals. The abacus, which is also partially restored, is ornamented with four honeysuckles separated from each other by geese in pairs. The lions are conventionalized but are endowed with vitality and dignity. The depressions in the eye-balls of the lions and geese probably indicate that they had precious stones in them.

The capital is somewhat inferior in execution to Aśoka's lion-capital at Sarnath and differs from it in some details.

Two other Mauryan sculptures are exhibited on the wall behind the capital. These are a broken umbrella (2747) and a stone bowl (2809). The umbrella is of highly-polished Chunar sandstone. Its outer side is plain, but the soffit is relieved by four concentric bands with radiating ribs in between. It probably belonged to the original brick *stūpa* of Aśoka (above, p. 3).

The bowl, which is also of the same material, has been pieced together from fragments and partially restored. It has an octagonal tapering shaft with fluted sides, surmounted by a cup-shaped capital—also eight-sided—on which rested the bowl, its sides now missing.

Next in chronological order is the section of the berm-railing of Stūpa 2, which has been reconstructed.

in the hall. The pillars of the railing consist of carvings in low relief. The names of the donors are recorded on them in early Brāhmī characters.

A number of sculptures from the gateways of Stūpa 1 are on display in the hall. Two damaged yet graceful *yakshī*-figures (2784 and 2867), placed at a small distance from the entrance on its either side, greet the visitor as he enters the hall. They are seen sporting under mango-trees bearing elongated leaves and bunches of fruits. The trees, however, do not belong to the *yakshī*-figures but have been placed with them to show the group as it would have looked in its original setting. The *yakshī*-figures are remarkable for the softness and warmth of their fleshy body brought about by delicate modelling and a sense of vitality imparted by the tense twist of the torso on its axis. The swelling roundness of their form is further accentuated by the tightly-clasping belts around their waists (pl. IV).

Just near the angles of the projection in the eastern wall are placed two winged lions (2681 and 2810), reminiscent of similar pieces produced in the ancient civilizations of Europe and Asia.

On either side of the entrance leading to gallery 1 are two elephants with their riders and attendants (2777 and 2778). They once filled the space between the architraves of the gateways and have their riders and attendants duplicated so that they could be seen from both the sides.

There are two sculptures of second century A.D. in the hall; one of them is an ornamented coping-stone (2712) and the other an inscribed pedestal (2785).

The coping-stone is probably from the *harmikā* of Stūpa 4. It is of buff-grey stone and is decorated on the exterior with an undulating lotus-design with birds perched in the foliage. The pedestal is that of a standing image of Buddha in red sandstone (pl. V) ; it originally came from Mathurā. There is an uncertain object between the feet. The feet on the proper left are of a small attendant. The front face of the pedestal is relieved by a dental cornice above the pilasters on either side. In the centre of the panel is a Bodhisattva-figure seated in *dhyāna-mudrā*. To his right are six male worshippers wearing tunics of the typical Kushan type. To the left are five female figures. The dedicatory inscription on the pedestal belongs to the twentysecond year of the reign of king Vaskushāna.

Two other Mathurā sculptures, belonging to the Gupta period, are also exhibited in the hall; both are Buddha-figures, one seated and the other standing. The former (2791) is seated cross-legged in *dhyāna-mudrā* (pl. VI). Its head has been refixed. Its *ushnīsha*, face and fingers are damaged. The hair is treated in conventional ringlets and the drapery is disposed in conventional folds covering both shoulders and arms. The sculpture, discovered from Stūpa 14, is of about the fourth century. The standing Buddha-figure (2790) has lost its head, feet and right arm. The drapery covers both shoulders and arms and the left hand holds the upper garment at the hip. The figure belongs to the fifth century.

In addition to these there are other three sculp-

tures of the Gupta period in the hall; amongst them two figures are of Bodhisattva Padmapāṇi and one of Vajrapāṇi. The former (2848 and 2857) are similar to each other in all respects and form companion-pieces, as the left knee of one and the right knee of the other are slightly bent. They wear elaborate tiara-ornaments, scarf and a short *dhotī*. Their right uplifted hands hold a lotus against the shoulders and the left ones hold the end of scarfs on hips. It appears that their plain nimbi had the rays painted on them. The figures belong to about the fifth century. Of the same date is the Vajrapāṇi-figure (2720), which once crowned Pillar 35 (above p. 5). It wears richly-jewelled necklace, heavy ear-rings and an elaborate head-dress (pl. VII A). The arms and legs are missing. The right hand appears to have held *vajra*, of which one end is still traceable on the right hip. The halo, too small in proportion to the size of statue, is pierced with twelve holes evenly disposed round its edge, perhaps intended for receiving the ends of outer rays fashioned out of copper gilt.

The capital of Pillar 26 (2787), of Gupta age, is a clumsy copy of its Aśokan prototype (above, p. 11). It has quadripartite lions supporting a *dharma-chakra*, which was absent in Aśoka's capital at Sanchi but was present in the one at Sarnath. Its circular abacus consists of birds and lotuses of uneven size and disposed in irregular fashion. The *dharma-chakra* is supported on a square block which has fanciful birds and floral designs carved on its faces.

Another architectural piece of the Gupta period

is a capital of a pilaster (2808) of about the fourth century. It has lotuses on three faces and *yakshas* at each of the front corners.

Seventh-century sculpture is represented by two Buddha-figures. Of them one (2786) is seated on a lotus supported by two lions and retains much of the elegance of the earlier century. The hair and *ushnīsha* are treated in the conventional manner. The right shoulder is bare. The left hand placed on the lap holds ends of the robe and the broken right one was probably in *abhaya-mudrā*. The other is a standing Buddha (2797), with the right hand in *varada-mudrā*. The upper garment covers shoulders and arms and is spread out at sides. The hair is treated in the usual fashion.

Of the medieval period we have a Buddha, a Bodhisattva, and two Tārā figures. The Buddha-figure (2780), which is in a standing pose, is datable to the ninth century on palaeographic grounds. It retains much of the plasticity of the Gupta period. The *ushnīsha* and other features are mutilated and the left fore-arm is broken. The upper garment covers both shoulders and arms. On the left margin is an inscription giving the Buddhist creed. The Bodhisattva-figure (2779) is of a somewhat later date. The figure is seated cross-legged on a throne supported by two lions and by a stem of lotus-plant springing from the pedestal. The head and arms are missing. The right hand apparently held a *vajra* almost touching the chest.

Of the two Tārā icons, one (2803) is of the tenth century and is seated in *lalitāsana*. Its head and right

fore-arm are missing. It wears ornaments and holds a full-blown lotus. On either side of the deity are two female attendants standing one above the other holding *chauris*. Below on the pedestal is a female devotee in prayer. The other Tārā figure (2765) is also headless. It stands on an inverted lotus. The left hand raised to the shoulder holds stalk of a lotus springing from a flower-pot near the left knee of the goddess. The right fore-arm is missing.

C. GALLERY 1

To the south of the main hall is gallery 1, which has large stone sculptures displayed on free-standing pedestals. Immediately on entering the gallery a captivating human figure carved on an upright (2678) from a gateway confronts the visitor. The figure (pl. VII B) of the first century B.C., wears a *dhoti*, ornaments and a head-dress with three top-knots. On either side of it are garlands suspended on pegs. The other face of the upright has floral design on it.

Another upright (2679) is displayed near by. On its front is carved a throne under a garlanded *pīpal*-tree symbolizing the enlightenment of Buddha. On the back is a floral design.

Two large *nāga*-figures of the Gupta period (2858 and 2859) are displayed facing each other against the eastern and western walls. One of them (2858) has a seven-headed serpent-hood above the head and serpent-coils at the back and sides. The uplifted right hand holds a lotus and the left a flask on the hip.

It wears a *dhotī* fastened by a plain girdle in front. The other figure, with similar hoods and coil, is much damaged. Its hands rest on the hips, the right one holding a lotus and two buds and the left a flask.

A large seated Buddha-figure (2771), of the sixth century (pl. XII), is placed against the southern wall. Buddha is here seated on a cushioned seat in *dhyāna-mudrā*. The robe covers both the shoulders. Behind are the remnants of a halo and beneath each ear a small mortise-hole, indicating that some time in the past the drooping ear-lobes had been repaired.

Of the same period is a double-lion figure (2675) in high relief, seated with right fore-paw placed on the left. It has two separate bodies but only one head and four legs. It was probably used as the capital of a pilaster and was meant to be seen from two sides.

Against the eastern wall is placed a headless standing Buddha-figure (2776) of the eighth century. It retains some of the features of the modelling of the preceding centuries. Behind the head is a damaged halo carved with lotus. On either side of the image stands a devotee holding a *chaurī*.

Against the same wall is a seated Bodhisattva-figure (2770), probably representing Mañjuśrī (pl. VIII). It is seated in *lalitāsana* on a double-lotus throne supported by a peacock. The head is missing. The right hand rests against the knee with the palm turned outwards. The left hand holds the stalk of a lotus springing from the pedestal below. The figure is of about the tenth century.

There is another Bodhisattva-figure (2677), of a

somewhat earlier date, in this gallery. It stands against a pilaster. The head has been refixed. The face is damaged and the right hand and left arm are missing. The left hand rests against the hip.

D. GALLERY 2

Further south is gallery 2 (pl. II). It has wall-showcases against the walls and a table-showcase in the centre, variously exhibiting small stone sculptures, terracottas, metal objects, pottery, relic-caskets, etc. The showcases against the northern and western walls contain stone sculptures, that against the southern wall has terracottas and those against the eastern wall have metal implements and pottery. The table-showcase also contains pottery.

In the showcase in the north-west corner is exhibited a beautiful head of a *chaurī*-bearer (142), of first century B.C. It wears large ear-pendants and a turban with high excrescence in front and a smaller one over the skull.

Another important sculpture exhibited here is the head of an Avalokiteśvara-figure (831), of about the fourth century. The head-dress, tip of the nose, chin and ear-lobes are damaged. The hair is disposed in ringlets bound by a fillet with a large rosette bearing a figure of the Dhyānī-Buddha Amitābha.

A Vishṇu-figure (2572), of about the fifth century and of uncertain origin, is exhibited in another showcase. It is a four-armed standing figure (pl. IX A) wearing a squarish head-dress. Two of the hands

and both the feet are broken. Of the remaining hands the left one holds a conch-shell and the right a lotus.

A beautiful head (835), of the medieval period, is also on view here. The nose and chin are damaged and the right ear-lobe is missing. The hair is combed back from the forehead and is arranged in a high triple chignon which is bound by an ornamental band with a front ornament and pendent strings of beads.

In one of the show-cases are exhibited stone plaques, of about the twelfth century, with figures of Brāhmaṇical deities, such as Viṣṇu, Gaṇeśa, Mahishamardini, etc.

A wide range of metal objects of daily use are also on display here. They include spear-heads, daggers, arrow-heads, plough-shares, pincers, locks, clamps, etc.

Amongst the terracottas displayed are votive *ushnīṣhas*, animal-figures, etc. The displayed pottery belongs to different periods.

E. GALLERY 3

This is the southernmost and last gallery in the museum. Medium-sized stone sculptures are displayed here, all on brackets fixed into the walls. There are also two table-showcases with metal pots and casts of relic-caskets in them.

The earliest sculptures in the gallery are of the first century B.C. and belong the gateways of the *stūpas*. On the northern wall can be seen three sculptures—a small damaged *yakṣī* 2789 under a mango-tree,

a *tri-ratna* symbol and the torso of a *chaurī*-bearer. The *tri-ratna* symbol (2731) from the top of one of the gateways of Stūpa has been pieced together from many fragments. It is supposed to represent Buddha, Dharma (piety) and Saṅgha (church)—the trinity of Buddhism.

The torso of the *chaurī*-bearer (2807) wears an elaborate beaded necklace and a *dhotī* fastened by a plain girdle with hanging ends.

Other fragments from the gateways are displayed against the western wall. A fragment from a pillar of one of the gateways (165) shows the lower portion of a relief containing the mutilated throne of Buddha and a pond with lotuses and ducks below.

Another such piece (2796) contains a headless female (pl. X) figure descending from a couch on the left and mutilated legs and tail of a horse on the right. The lady wears a transparent *dhotī* and a scarf.

A fragment from the lowest architrave of the south gateway of Stūpa 1 shows a tree with the head of a peacock facing a scorpion to the right. Another fragment is from a short railing (2925) having the front face relieved with capital of a pillar surmounted by four lions set back to back and supporting a *chakra*.

Next in chronological order is an ornamented Bodhisattva-figure (2715), of the second century. It is seated in *dhyāna-mudrā*. The head, arms and knees are missing. The left shoulder has folds of garments over it, the right shoulder being bare. The dedicatory inscription on it belongs to the twentyeighth year of the Kushan king Mahārāja Rājātirāja Devaputra Shāhi Vāsishka. The figure is of Mathurā red sandstone.

Near by is displayed a headless Buddha-figure (pl. XI) seated in meditation on a lotus-throne in a sunk panel (2701). The drapery is in conventional folds and covers both shoulders and arms. It is a Gupta piece of about fifth century.

Of the same period is the double-lion figure (128) in high relief which is similar to the one displayed in Gallery 1 (2675) but is in a more damaged state.

A later Buddha-figure (2775), exhibited against the eastern wall, is datable to the ninth century on the basis of the characters of the Buddhist creed inscribed on the right margin of its slab. It is a figure standing on a lotus. The head, right fore-arm and left hand are missing. The figure retains the plasticity of the classical Gupta art to some extent.

A six-armed headless standing female figure (2802), of about the tenth century, is displayed against the same wall. It stands on a cushion and wears ornaments. All the hands, except one of the right ones holding a sword, are missing. On either side of the deity is a female attendant standing one behind the other. The cushion is flanked by two kneeling devotees, recognizable in their remnants.

Figures of three *dik-pālas* (guardians of the directions), all of the medieval period, are exhibited further south against the same wall. They represent Kubera (2805), Varuṇa (2804) and perhaps Nīṛiti (2623). Kubera, with ornaments, stands between round pilasters. His right hand apparently holds a lotus against the shoulder and the stretched-down left hand a purse of money. Near his right foot is the bust of a figure.

Varuṇa, also between round pilasters, wears an elaborate head-dress, ornaments, garlands and the sacred thread. His right hand holds an uncertain object against the chest and the stretched-down left hand a *pāśa*. Near the left foot is the fore-part of a *makara*. The last *dik-pāla*, with only his lower part surviving, again stands between round pilasters. He has the usual ornaments, the sacred thread and a long garland. The left hand rests on the thigh and the right one holds the handle of the sword on the hip. On the pedestal is the fore-part of a strange animal. The deity is probably Nirṛiti.

A twelfth-century figure of the Buddhist goddess Chundā (2638) is displayed in the same row. It is a badly-damaged figure with its face and breasts chipped off. The upper hands are raised to the shoulder, the left hand apparently holding a lotus and the right one a lotus and a rosary. The lower right hand is in *varada-mudrā* and the left one holds an uncertain object on the lap. Above the mutilated halo is a Buddha-figure with a goddess holding a lotus in her left hand and seated on his left.

A Jambhala-image (2781), of the same period, is exhibited on the opposite wall. It is a headless figure seated in *lalitāsana* on an ornamental seat supported on five vases, two of which, on which the right foot rests, are reversed. The left hand placed on the knee holds a mongoose; the right hand is missing.

On the northern wall are three sculptures from the Mālā-devī temple at Gyāraspur (District Vidisha), belonging to about the tenth century. One of them

(2869), badly damaged, represents a mother-and-child lying on serpent-coils and surrounded by divine figures. The other (2870) is a well-preserved figure of Gaja-Lakshmi. The last one (2871) shows a four-armed seated Śiva with female attendants.

One of the table-showcases contains casts of caskets, in which bodily relics of Buddhist saints were placed for enshrinement in *stūpas*, recovered from Sanchi and its neighbourhood. They all belong to the period near about the Christian epoch.

In the other table-showcase are exhibited pots and other objects of iron.

F. VERANDAH

Four stone sculptures are exhibited in the verandah outside gallery 2. Three of them (2872-74) are richly ornamented figures of *chauri*-bearers from Gyaspur, of about the tenth century. The fourth one (2855) is a seventh-century relief from Sanchi itself representing the subjugation of the mad elephant Nālāgiri (pl. IX B) by Buddha at Rājagṛha. The head and the left arm of Buddha are missing. His right hand rests on the head of the elephant, behind which stands Indra holding a *chauri* in his right hand and *vajra* (thunder-bolt) in the left. The other attendant resembles Buddha and holds a long staff in his right hand. Above is an ornamental halo with garland-bearing *gandharvas* (celestial beings) amidst the clouds. The Buddhist creed is inscribed on the halo.

APPENDIX

LIST OF OBJECTS WITH ACCESSION-NUMBERS
DESCRIBED IN THE TEXT

ACC. NO.	PAGE	ACC. NO.	PAGE
128	22 ✓	2784	13 ✓
142	19 ✓	2785	13 ✓
165	21 ✓	2786	16 ✓
831	19 ✓	2787	15 ✓
835	20 ✓	2789	20 ✓
2572	19 ✓	2790	14 ✓
2623	22 ✓	2791	14 ✓
2638	28 ✓	2796	21 ✓
2675	18 ✓	2797	16 ✓
2677	18 ✓	2802	22 ✓
2678	17 ✓	2803	16 ✓
2679	17 ✓	2804	22 ✓
2681	13 ✓	2805	22 ✓
2701	29 ✓	2807	21 ✓
2712	13 ✓	2808	16 ✓
2715	21 ✓	2809	12 ✓
2720	15 ✓	2810	13 ✓
2725	21 ✓	2848	15 ✓
2731	21 ✓	2855	24 ✓
2747	12 ✓	2857	15 ✓
2765	17 ✓	2858	17 ✓
2770	18 ✓	2859	17 ✓
2771	18 ✓	2867	13 ✓
2775	29 ✓	2868	11 ✓
2776	18 ✓	2869	24 ✓
2777	13 ✓	2870	24 ✓
2778	13 ✓	2871	24 ✓
2779	16 ✓	2872	24 ✓
2780	16 ✓	2873	24 ✓
2781	23 ✓	2874	24 ✓

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